

Wandering birds stop to be counted

By Judy Silber
For The Patriot Ledger

Woodie Lackey and his wife, Elaine, did the usual things this weekend. They cooked, washed dishes, worked at their computer and read.

But they also did something unusual. As they went from room to room in their Duxbury home, they looked out their windows to survey the birds feeding in their back yard.

The Lackeys were among thousands of bird-watchers who participated in this year's Great Backyard Bird Count, an event aimed at helping scientists gather information about North American birds.

Sponsored by the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, the Great Backyard Bird Count asks people to count and identify backyard birds and report the information to a web site on the Internet. The event began Friday and ends today.

By yesterday afternoon, 7,924 people in the country had made entries.

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Backyard census keeps track of migrating birds

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"The citizens are acting as scientists, collecting data that would otherwise take scientists dozens of years to collect," said Sally Conyne of the Audubon Society.

The Lackeys have many bird feeders. Woodie Lackey said he enjoys bird-watching because identifying the many species "is kind of like solving a mystery." He said he likes the idea of a bird count because "it will be nice to look back and see what's happening in our neighborhood."

The information will help researchers determine the migratory

pattern of birds.

Allison Wells, a spokeswoman at Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, said the bird count is held in late winter before some species begin spring migration. She said songbirds live in Massachusetts during the spring and summer but migrate south for winter. Canadian birds migrate to Massachusetts for its relatively warmer winters.

Dan Furbish, the live-in caretaker at the Daniel Webster Wildlife Sanctuary in Marshfield, spent Saturday bird-watching for species that make their home year-round in Massachusetts and others that seek winter refuge here. He spotted both.

Among the 20 species Furbish

identified were cardinals, downy woodpeckers and chickadees, which are year-round species, along with long-eared owls and ducks that migrate from Canada for the winter.

Spotting several chickadees in some underbrush, Furbish said, "They're a real friendly bird, very inquisitive."

Last night, as bird-watchers were still entering data, Wells said Cornell scientists were already noticing differences between this year's and last year's counts.

She said one example is the numbers of redpolls, a finch that migrates from Canada to Massachusetts. Last year, Massachusetts bird-watchers spotted 269 of the birds. This year, the count has recorded only three.

Wells said the numbers back up the theory that redpolls migrate south only every other winter.

Dux. Clipper, Wed., Aug. 28, '96

Shorebirds



The photo above by Scott Hecker of Duxbury appears in the new issue (September) of *National Geographic*, with a blurb on the plight of Piping Plovers in recent years in Massachusetts. Scott's and others' efforts to preserve Piping Plovers on Duxbury Beach and in the state have paid off, but it's an ongoing effort.

